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ABSTRACT

Ten years ago in the Harare Declaration, heads of government from across the British Commonwealth committed to upholding critical commonwealth-held values. While initially focusing on Human Rights Education, the Commonwealth Secretariat set about enabling member governments to promote greater awareness, education, and training supporting democracy, human rights, and respect for individual freedoms. In 2002, the Commonwealth Secretariat's Education Department undertook a deeper level of study of the education institutions which, through their programs, are seeking to further this initiative and to assess lessons learned and to determine the future. The Ministries of Education of two Caribbean small states, Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana, both with issues of multiculturalism, diversity, and ethnicity high on the political agenda, have supported a Secretariat-driven initiative to enable information gathering on citizenship education in school-based and non-formal education forums. Following identification of and interviews with potential partners, a search conference activity in both states was conducted, culminating in a draft Caribbean Action Agenda for Citizenship Education to solidify and deepen the thrust. This paper discusses the impact of state size on the education system; citizenship education as cultural values transmission; issues of context vs. curriculum content; Jamaica: socioeconomic challenges to education; Montserrat; and impact of environmental hazards. The paper finds that the future of the Citizenship Education Initiative must consider the context, milieu, and environment in which the curriculum is taught. It is important to approach the dissemination of the initiative from the perspective of the learner rather than the teacher. (Contains 12 notes.) (BT)

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Challenges of Citizenship Education in Small States – Issues of Context vs. Content

A background paper prepared for the
Pan-Commonwealth Project on Heritage,
Multiculturalism and Citizenship

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND:

"We need to actively promote the notion of good citizenship as a dynamic and constantly negotiated reality in a multi-cultural society."

– HE Rt. Hon. Don McKinnon, Commonwealth Secretary General
(March 2001)

For 16-year old "Trewick", an unemployed male Rastafarian youth from an inner-city community in Kingston, Jamaica - tempted by the drug dons, cajoled by local politicians and threatened by the police on a daily basis - the negotiation of his citizenship is a reality that he is forced to address on a daily basis for his own survival. "Trewick" is far from alone among youth in similar circumstances in many other parts of the Commonwealth – and specifically its 32 small states – where respect for human rights, celebration of cultural diversity and the enhancement of values education have been neither the form or the substance of the education system or the societies in which they live. Yet the Education system is the most frequently used formal vehicle for the transmission of those norms and cultural practices that are valued and that societies wish to have carried forward by future generations into posterity.

Ten years ago in the Harare Declaration (1991) heads of government from across the Commonwealth committed themselves to upholding critical "commonwealth-held" values such as:

- democratic processes, the rule of law, the independence of the judiciary and just and honest government.
- equal rights and opportunities for all citizens regardless of race, colour, creed or political belief.

Whilst initially focussing on Human Rights Education, the Commonwealth Secretariat set about enabling member governments to promote greater awareness, education and

training in support of democracy, human rights and respect for individual fundamental freedoms (Awuku; Girdwood, 2000)[1].

The Secretariat's Education Department, Human Rights Unit, and Youth programme have all been engaged in relevant activities , the output of which yielded among others :

- An Education project on Commonwealth Values which surveyed curriculum and students understanding of their human rights (1994 ; 1997).
- A Commonwealth human rights curriculum for Caribbean teachers (1998).
- A Conference on Values in Education held in 1998.
- A Model Human rights curriculum for law schools of the Commonwealth.

By 2000, Education Ministers at the 14th Triennial Conference in Halifax Canada encouraged the "use of education to promote values of democracy, human rights, good governance and tolerance". Such an initiative should include a life skills curriculum and a focus on the training of teachers in this area.

Despite efforts of the many Commonwealth-wide agencies however such as the Commonwealth Institute, the Commonwealth Foundation, the Commonwealth of Learning – all of which have contributed to the Citizenship Education thrust - "Trewick"s across the Commonwealth are still battling for survival alongside many other young citizens, in societies which give no more than lip-service to human rights, multiculturalism and the rule of law.

The Commonwealth Secretariats Education Department has undertaken in 2002 a deeper level of study of the education institutions, both formal and non-formal, which through their programmes are seeking to further this initiative and to assess what lessons have been learnt so far and to determine the way forward for the future.

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[1] "Values, Education and the Commonwealth" – Emmanuel Awuku and Alison Girdwood Education in "Education in the Commonwealth" publ. Kensington (2000)

The Ministries of Education of two Caribbean small states – Trinidad and Tobago sand Guyana – both countries with issues of multiculturalism, diversity and ethnicity as high on the political agenda – have supported a Secretariat-driven initiative to enable information-gathering on Citizenship Education at present in school-based and non-formal education forums. Following identification of and interviews with potential partners, a Search Conference activity in both states was conducted. This has culminated in a draft Caribbean Action Agenda for Citizenship Education to concretise and deepen the thrust.

Concurrent with the Small States activity will be a Pan-African initiative to be held in South Africa in which the framework of a Commonwealth-wide approach will be agreed.

The Impact of size on the Education system: Virtue or Vice?

The economists tell us that small states generally, and those of the Commonwealth specifically, face less stability and are more vulnerable than they were ten years ago as we live in a more uncertain and unstable world than we did ten years ago. Whereas the level of geo-political threat may have diminished, despite the concerns surrounding September 11th, 2001, the socio-economic and environmental threats have in fact grown.

Traditionally the language for defining the characteristics of small states has bordered on the pejorative – **Insularity; Weakness; Dependence; Vulnerability**; (Sutton and Payne, 1993)[2] – in recent years one hears with welcome emphasis, **Openness, Resilience, Resourcefulness, Resistance and Versatility**[3] (Bernal, 2001). Regardless of semantic differences there can be no disagreement with the view that many small states have and will continue to experience:

- A decline in resource in-flows from foreign direct investment, international donor support, and remittances from families overseas.

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[2] "Lilliput under Threat: the Security Problems of Small Island and Enclave Developing States" P. Sutton and A. Payne in Political Studies, Vol. XLI, No.4, 579-593.

[3] "Globalisation and Small Developing Economies: Challenges and Opportunities" – Ambassador Richard Bernal of Jamaica to the United States.

- Potential disasters from global warming and climate change.
- Environmental fragility especially with respect to natural disasters (hurricanes; volcanoes; earthquakes etc.).
- New threats to security especially from money laundering and the drug trade.

From the economic perspective of the public-run Education system in small states, we are reminded that they suffer from diseconomies of scale in investment, transportation and the provision of government services, as a minimum structure of government and level of services is necessary irrespective of size. Put simply, the system being equal, it can cost more to educate a child in a small state than in a large one, given the higher per capita costs in establishing basic infrastructure (Economic Affairs Division, 1997)[4].

Small states of the Commonwealth are not alone of course in facing the issues of financing education in a situation of declining resources. Wright (2000) in discussing the financing of the teaching force in African countries, **large and small**, indicates that over the last twenty years the real income of teachers has been significantly reduced, in some countries rapidly and in others substantially.[5] Public sector reform processes often introduced for structural readjustment objectives, have in many ways contributed to this decline which impacts teacher attitudes, morale and professionalism.

A weak Education system yields a weak output – "Trewicks" in abundance - unemployed and unemployable youth. Traditional extended family support systems and migration may have softened the impact of this situation in some small states, but in others, the break-up of traditional systems and rural urbanisation have reduced both the level and likelihood of support (Economic Division, 1997).[6] Structural adjustment programmes in many small states such as Jamaica and Guyana have led to the

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[4] "A future for Small States – Overcoming Vulnerability" – The Economic Affairs Division, Commonwealth Secretariat (1997)

[5] In "Reclaiming the Teaching Profession – a response to public sector reforms in Africa" – Cream Wright publ. Commonwealth Secretariat (2000)

[6] "A future for Small States – Overcoming Vulnerability" – The Economic Affairs Division, Commonwealth Secretariat (1997)

emergence of an "informal" economic sector which encourages tax evasion, and improper business and professional practices. This situation yields the prime environment for the emergence of many more unskilled, unemployable, yet bright and intelligent youth who become willing fodder for the drug trafficking, prostitution and other "informal" industries.

The importance of an educated workforce as the salvation of small state economies is captured by Bernal (2001) who in referring to the economic growth of East Asian countries over the last three decades illustrates how through transformation of their education and training systems, labour productivity increased. A strong economy can lead to higher levels of investment in human capital and a stronger education system, all of which contribute to economic growth. The antithesis is the weak economy leading to limited human capital investment hence a weakened education system contributing to economic decline (Bray; Packer, 1993). For too many of the small states of the Commonwealth, the antithesis is reality.

It is instructive that even in a robust economy, the state of education in **small states** is not necessarily ideal. Brunei Darussalam is noted as a small state whose education system "suffers from severe qualitative malaise in the midst of material luxury" (Bray; Packer, 1993). Such is the wealth of this small country that many citizens of Brunei do not see what benefits they can derive from education, have no need to work hard for money, nor strive for a job.

Whilst admitting that some small economies have definite constraints on the factors of production because of limited land area (in some instances), population size and gross domestic product (GDP), improvements in both quality and quantity of education can lead to a more knowledgeable and productive workforce. For example, once modern telecommunications and informatics are in place, small developing countries with educated populations are also well positioned to capitalise on the information and communication industry and to produce for niche markets, for example.

The transformation of the vice of small size into a virtue through recognition of the need for abandonment of a traditional mind-set, acceptance of the need to change and the advent of a new paradigm for small states is strongly encouraged (Bernal, 2001). Despite such positivism, however, there is abundant evidence that the social, economic and political conditions in which many **small states** find themselves at present are far from desirable and in many instances deleterious rather than supportive of initiatives such as the Citizenship Education thrust of the Commonwealth Secretariat

Citizenship Education as Cultural Values Transmission ?

Education as the vehicle or mechanism, in addition to the family structure, of transmitting the cultural values and norms of a society has been well established in the literature on this topic (Bray, Packer 1993). In the small state context depending on the level of complexity of the society – whether mono-cultural or pluralistic - the impact of the Education system can be far greater on the student than system impact in a more complex society, where issues of multi-cultural diversity involving customs and practices , for example, may leave a student both more confused and hopefully more enlightened.

The Pan-Commonwealth Citizenship Education Initiative has endeavoured to go beyond the traditional curriculum subject called "Civics". It defines Citizenship Education in schools as:

> **"increasing the knowledge, skills and values relevant to the nature of participative democracy and also to enhance the awareness of rights and duties, and the sense of responsibilities needed for the development of pupils into active citizens."** (Q and C Authority, 1998)[7]

Citizenship Education is also described as challenging racism and sexism, integration in society and creating a social order that will help to provide "security without repression" (Osler; Starkey 1996)[8].

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[7] "Education for Citizenship and the Teaching of Democracy in Schools": Final Report of the Advisory Group for Citizenship - Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (1998)
[8] "Teacher Education and Human Rights" publ. Fulton (1996)

Before the Commonwealth initiative, however, and indeed well before Harare, education institutions such as International Schools were providing a form of multi-cultural/multi-racial education which might be put in the category of the informal or "hidden" curriculum. Writing from a non-Commonwealth country, Thailand, an administrator of the New International School of that country states:

> **"we do not teach multiculturalism because we are multicultural. Our school includes students from over 50 nationalities, and our focus is simply on fundamental values such as respect and understanding of people as individuals. We take every opportunity to exploit and celebrate our diversity in individual and special events but we do not have any specific course bearing labels such as "multiculturalism" and "citizenship". Rather than topics to be studied, we prefer to regard the UN principles such as Human Rights as values to be modelled on a daily basis" (Mike Matthews, 2001).**

The United World Colleges programme, which has one of its institutions in the African small state of Swaziland, though considered in some quarters as being somewhat elitist, is another initiative, which seeks to:

> **"bring together young people from across the globe to become responsible citizens, politically and environmentally aware, committed to the ideals of peace, justice, understanding and cooperation and to the implementation of these ideals through action and personal example." (United World Colleges web-site)**

A burning issue in the debate on Citizenship Education is whether it should be "Values-explicit" or "Values-neutral". Should Citizenship Education promote specific values or should it be values-neutral or free, taking a neutral stance to values and controversial issues, leaving the individual to arrive at their own decisions. Kerr (1999) stresses that this issue is essential to the decision any country must take about its direction in a citizenship education programme.

The Issues of Context versus Curriculum Content

Context is proposed as critically important in the design and development of a curriculum for the education of the citizen. Scholars are agreed that programmes will only succeed if they take into account the particular historical, cultural and social traditions of each country or context in which the programme is to be presented (Kerr, 1999)[9].

When the social milieu in which one lives endorses and reinforces the values that the curriculum – formal or informal - is trying to impart, the task is obviously simpler. In such contexts previously mentioned, as Thailand, Swaziland and others where the Commonwealth Citizenship initiative has been fostered, supported and even made compulsory curriculum, there is less confusion and disconfirming information for the student. In essence, in those socio-cultural and economically supportive environments in which one is "living, eating and sleeping" the principles of good citizenship, it is far simpler and easier to actually do so, to display the conduct and behaviours consistent with the initiative.

There are many contexts in the Commonwealth where this socio-environmental reinforcement is not there, however.

Jamaica – Socio-economic challenges to Education

The conditions in which an education is being pursued by the majority of Jamaican children today is captured by a recent UNICEF (1999)[10] report which indicates that 30% of the children in the primary school system in Jamaica graduate functionally illiterate and that 19.5% out of every 100 children do not attend primary school.

In an ILO-sponsored study conducted of antecedents of Child Labour in the mid-island coastal parish of Clarendon in Jamaica (Degazon-Johnson, 2001)[11] despite indications that many of the child labourers interviewed recognised the value of an education

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[9] "Citizenship Educatrion: an International Comparison" – David Kerr, publ. INCA (1999)

[10] United Nations International Childrens Education Fund (UNICEF) – State of the World's Children – UNICEF House, New York (1999)

[11] "A report on the baseline survey of the Nature, Extent, Causes and consequences of Child Labour in Jamaica" - R. Degazon-Johnson publ. International Labour Organization"

and wished to acquire a skill at some later stage - it was clear that the cost of "free education" (transport to school; books; uniform and shoes; lunch money) was inhibiting many a child from attending school and many a parent from sending their child to school.

School enrollment, attendance and examinations

The evidence from the studies made in three primary schools confirmed a dramatic fall-off in enrollment and attendance after the age of 11, the year in which most primary school children take the selective examination (GSAT) that determines whether they receive a "free place" in a secondary/high school. The results of this exam ultimately determine a child's future in Jamaica. Failure at this level means failure in life for many with few opportunities for legitimate gainful employment.

The teachers as role model

There is a serious absence of male teachers to operate as role models in the local school system and this is considered one of the contributing factors for the low levels of participation of male students after the age of 11 years. Far from being a sex-role preference, the salary and conditions of service of the average Jamaican teacher make teaching as a career, the profession of last rather than first resort.

School Quality

Evidence supports the view that the standard of the schooling received varies according to the school and possibly the teachers. Thus, some children may be responding negatively to a less stimulating and well-equipped educational environment. Hence the cases of child labourers who were "happy truants" endangering their lives by following mature fishermen out to sea, could indicate the emergence of a potentially gifted child with an independent spirit, not being motivated by the school programme, and greatly preferring to try his/her luck at the sea-side and on the open sea than by being under-stimulated in an ill-equipped school environment.

Availability and access

There is a dearth of post primary vocational and technical institutions in parts of Jamaica where there is population of the

density to warrant such institutions. Where these exist they cater, however, to the higher performing students, with GSAT or Technical school entrance qualifications. Competition for places in these schools can be intense as students from other parishes seek to attend these schools also.

Domestic economic constraints
Families in economic difficulties are also the cause for the cases of children performing labour. Children who have been kept at home to assist their parents with their hairdressing parlours, to sell sweets, to sell in the market, to take the livestock out to feed, are all cases where the parent feels/appears unable to provide for the child to attend school, and provides them with a means of making an income from which the parent benefits.

When a child is living and experiencing socio-economic deprivation, poor quality in schooling and teaching, poor role models and parental disregard for the child rights, can Commonwealth Values influence him or her? Much less when surrounded by the antithesis of the principles being conveyed, by social conditions which negate these principles, can they be transmitted?

Montserrat – the Impact of Environmental hazards
Post-volcano Montserrat is the quintessential example of the vulnerable small state and the havoc that the impact of an environmental hazard can mete out in the sphere of Education .
Migration of the more educated, skilled and competent to the "greener pastures" of developed countries is discussed as a long standing feature of Caribbean small states, and a more recent characteristic of the small states of the South Pacific. In the case of Montserrat, in the pre-Soufriere volcano crisis, the negative impact on the economy of the "brain drain" was mitigated by the remittances which were returned to the island by those who had sought and found better opportunities elsewhere (Bray; Packer, 1993).

The north of Montserrat, the area deemed relatively safe from the volcano is 15.52 square kilometres or less than a quarter of the islands surface area. At the end of 1997, 3,381 people were residing in the north, a reduction of nearly 75% of the population

based on pre-eruption figures of 11-12,000. The movement of these 3,000 odd people to the safer zone of the north constituted an increase of more than 100% of the usual population of that area. Dislocation and domestic uncertainty affected everyone. (Patullo, 2000)[12]

The schools and health services were affected. Many children were taken off island with at least one parent – usually the mother - whilst the other parent stayed. This led to family separations. The schools experienced swift reduction in enrolment figures and were obliged to vastly cut the teaching staff. In 1998, 54 teachers remained on island where once a well-qualified and capable teaching resource of 200 had existed. Many who left were well qualified and could foster hopes of obtaining jobs overseas, and did. But this meant a brain/resource drain for this tiny country from which it will probably not recover for at least another generation.

To have been a school student during the worst years of the crisis and to have remained on island in Montserrat, meant sleeping at night in church and school shelters with persons hardly known to you, and waking up to a school day discovering that a well qualified teacher on whom one relied had swiftly left the country for safer, if not greener pastures. It meant going to a different school and being rapidly thrust among a different group of students from those one had already known and with whom one had made friends.

The situation has greatly improved from the standpoint of accommodation and teacher resources over the last two years, but for a 4-5 year period the school student on this tiny island who did not migrate to another country experienced, not merely drastic change, but chaos in their life. Even those who migrated were presented with conditions sometimes no less challenging, but for the threat of volcano ash.

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[12] "Fire from the Mountain – the Montserrat tragedy and the betrayal of its people", - Polly Patullo (2000)

Could such a child be expected to be receptive to values of equality of treatment, fairness, democracy, socio- environmental security, when exposed to deprivation of an education and of family because of an environmental hazard that no-one can determine the end of?

Conclusion

There are many young Commonwealth citizens who do not have the advantages or benefits of environments conducive to the teaching of Commonwealth values and Citizenship Education.
With one third of the Commonwealth – some 700 million people – living in poverty, it has to be accepted that not only can hungry students be expected to learn but that students whose rights and privileges are abused cannot be expected to accept and practice those principles in a vacuum. Indeed if they were exposed to some of the principles, the realities of the society in which they live would be a contradiction of what they are being taught, or encouraged to live, in school.

Much of the alienation from school that can lead to school drop-out can be nurtured and encouraged by societies and education systems which are not "walking the talk", which are teaching their students one thing whilst within the society , the social, economic and environmental realities negate what is being professed in the schools.

As we seek to actively promote the notion of "good citizenship as a dynamic and constantly negotiated reality", it is recognised that just as the concept of Utopia may be a dream to constantly strive towards, it is the education process which enables us to recognise and wish to change the ills in our societies. Notwithstanding when there are not even basic standards and the conditions of being educated are in and of themselves an inhibitor to learning, then there must be cause for concern as Citizenship Education will fall on ears deafened by the rumble of a hungry stomach, and our "Trewick"'s will be forever with us.

Recommendations

This paper concludes with a few recommendations for the future:

(i) The future of the Citizenship Education Initiative must take into account the context, regardless of the country, milieu and environment in which the curriculum is taught and consider the impact of Social Injustice, Poverty, Gender discrimination and Human Rights Abuses on the student who is being exposed to the principles and values of good citizenship.

(ii) The importance of approaching the dissemination of the initiative from the perspective of the Learner rather than the Teacher is of extreme importance. Addressing the conditions in which the Citizenship Education programme will be presented will be as important as the content or methodology of the programme itself. This may mean that the programme may be as diverse as the 54 different member countries of the Commonwealth.

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